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THE FIRST ARROW OF ISLAM:  
THE CONFLUENCE OF POLITICS, RELIGION, AND CULTURE  
IN THE BATTLE OF BADR

By

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## Table of Contents

Disclaimer .....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Purpose and Methodology .....	1
Historical Context .....	4
Geographical Context .....	9
Culture & Badr.....	12
Fate & Martyrdom .....	12
Honor & Revenge .....	15
Tribal Solidarity .....	17
Politics & Badr.....	20
Constitution of Medina .....	20
The Pledges of Aqaba .....	23
The <i>Ummah</i> as a Political Entity.....	25
Religion & Badr.....	27
<i>Jihad, Dar al-Harb, &amp; Dar al-Islam</i> .....	27
The Quran & Badr .....	29
The <i>Hadith</i> & Badr .....	34
The Battle of Badr.....	40
The Geography of Badr .....	40
Precipitous Events Leading to Badr.....	41
Abu Sufyan's Caravan .....	44
The Battle.....	48
Conclusion .....	53
Bibliography .....	56
Notes .....	59

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Arabian Peninsula.....	9
Figure 2. Clans of Quraysh .....	21
Figure 3. Map of Muslim Raids .....	42
Figure 4. The Sultaniyya Road .....	44
Figure 5. Map of the Battlefield of Badr.....	49
Figure 6. A General View of the Battlefield of Badr.....	51



## **Introduction**

### *Purpose and Methodology*

The western view of Islamic military history has generally been treated from the viewpoint of western culture and through western eyes. It has most notably been seen in light of the Crusades or wars of Islamic conquest but has rarely been given due justification from any cultural or political point of view. The rise of western interest in Islamic warfare has increased because of the perceived rise in Islamic Fundamentalism in the past century, but Islamic warfare has been around much longer than just the Crusades or the so-called Islamic Fundamentalism and Islamic Globalization of recent years. The modern form of Muslim extremist warfare has been treated mainly as an extension of *jihad*, or holy war, and very little emphasis is given to any cultural or political backgrounds to a particular conflict. Moreover, the vast majority of Islamic warfare in history has been offensive in nature with very few exceptions to the contrary (the Crusades being one).

This paper will provide analysis on the events which took place before the Battle of Badr to include political, cultural, and religious ideas which may provide some causal factors to the conflict. Furthermore, it will also look at the actual battle itself which will hopefully provide a baseline for future analysis on modern-day Muslim's conduct in battle. The Battle of Badr in 624 was the first offensive military operation in Islamic history and fuses political, religious, and cultural ideologies in a military engagement. This confluence of factors combined with the opportunity of battle provided the launching point for Islam to establish itself as a world religion.

Most every conflict has political underpinnings and Islamic history is not without these motives. Furthermore, the notion of religion being the dominant factor in modern Islamic warfare is not necessarily true as Osama Bin Laden has frequently pronounced one of his

motives as restoration of the Islamic Caliphate, a political objective in and of itself. The Battle of Badr, as will be seen, had its own political objectives which Muhammad sought to achieve for his early movement. There were obvious gains to be made for bringing together a cohesive alliance in his early ministry and Muhammad used the opportunity at Badr to solidify this fragile coalition.

More important than any political coalition was Muhammad's ability to appeal to the cultural standards and patterns of behavior of the disparate Arabian people. Muhammad's ability to bring together dissimilar tribes within a greater tribal construct towards political and religious objectives is one of Badr's greatest achievements. A fascinating aspect of the battle was how Muhammad was able to leverage tribal allegiances in his favor to achieve his political objectives. At Badr we find tribes previously aligned with particular parties come together under Muhammad's leadership where they otherwise would have shied away.

As important as the cultural and political motives behind the Battle of Badr may be, they pale in comparison to the religious significance and motivations of the early Muslim founders. The religious rhetoric of the battle still resonates today in mosque teachings and children's schooling and the significance of the battle cannot be understated. Since it had such lasting significance, a corresponding understanding of the religious motives must be equally important if we are to adequately understand why the battle took place. Muhammad wasn't just out to seek political domination over the various tribal societies of the Arabian Peninsula, he was seeking to unify them based off a religious ideology and this, more than any treaty or economic benefit he might gain, was what ultimately leads to Badr's lasting significance. Furthermore, the Quran and *Hadith* have much to say about Badr and understanding what they contain is critical to understanding Badr.

The battle itself appears to be a deliberate attempt by Muhammad and his followers to establish legitimacy and build on their cultural and political momentum in order to gain control over the Arabic population. The evidence points to Badr being the culmination of the opportunity Muhammad had been looking for throughout the early years of his prophet hood. Through the events of the battle including intelligence reports, types of weapons used, the topography of the battlefield, and the disposition of forces we find significant insight into how Islamic military operations might behave today. Although this will not be the focus of this paper, the conduct of the combatants including the treatment of prisoners, the distribution of plunder, and how the victory was followed up by Muhammad are among some topics to be looked at for future research opportunities.

This project uses historical research methods to evaluate the significance of the Battle of Badr. There is a significant gap in the historiography of seventh century Arabia and a very small amount of work on the Battle of Badr itself, specifically from a western viewpoint. It is most frequently dealt with as a piece of the overall puzzle in understanding the life of Muhammad or as a case study in dealing with a particular subject in the broader scope of Muslim history or religious jurisprudence. An occasional Islamic historian has approached the subject with similar intentions but rarely with the aim of providing a comprehensive study of just the battle. This causes a few research challenges.

Foremost amongst these challenges is that of source authenticity. Any project that deals with matters of faith ultimately runs into difficulties in discovering what is fact and what is not and the Battle of Badr is no exception. Beyond this relatively minor blemish on the material relating to Badr is the more significant imperfection of actual numbers of primary documents relating to the events. There is a large dearth of historiography relating to early Muslim history

and this deficiency limits the ability to decipher what actually happened over fifteen hundred years ago. With this in mind, it is sometimes not as important to know what *precisely* took place as to know what the effects of what is generally understood to have taken place are. This is the predominant viewpoint taken in this paper and is the foundational point from which the research was conducted. Another significant challenge to this research is the matter of impartiality in the sources used because of the sensitive nature of dealing with a religious subject. Objectivity on both sides of the matter must always be taken into consideration.

Because there are a limited number of primary sources available for Badr, this paper largely uses secondary sources that have treated Badr as a peripheral subject on whatever their particular purpose might be. For example, synthesis of tribal behaviors, Islamic law, and religious *jihad* are but a few of the types of analysis used in placing Badr in proper historical context. Furthermore, religious documents such as the Quran and Hadith have been used understanding the limitations provided above.

### *Historical Context*

The world political landscape during Muhammad's time was dominated on one hand by the Roman Empire of the west and the Persian Empire in the east. The Persians were in a struggle for power against their longtime foes of Byzantium and may have had little impact on the daily activities of the average Arabian. Seventh century Arabia, however, provided the perfect breeding ground for Muhammad to begin his ministry as many of the people were probably serving in the various wars or caught in the middle as the pivot to the world's primary trade routes. Muhammad most certainly "grew to maturity in a world in which high finance and international politics were inextricably mixed up."<sup>1</sup>



A brief description of Muhammad's ministry and his eventual rise to significance is important. Armed with the revelations of the angel Gabriel, Muhammad needed a vehicle with which to propagate his newfound faith and he started with his own family. Indeed, the Quran speaks of Badr in reference to this first revelation telling the Muslims that "had you believed in God and what we sent down to our servant on the day of decision, the day on which the two parties met"<sup>2</sup> may not have needed to even take place. The reference to the two parties is the encounter at Badr and already we see Muhammad receiving plans of conquest.

According to Ishaq, one of the first reported converts to Islam was Khadija, Muhammad's cousin who called him "son of my uncle" and who would eventually become his wife.<sup>3</sup> She was said to be a very powerful woman of the Quraysh and "of the greatest dignity"<sup>4</sup> amongst one of the most prominent Meccan tribes. Muhammad would begin to convert the immediate members of his family first while attempting to consolidate his power within the powerful Quraysh tribe. The marriage to Khadija provided Muhammad the legitimacy that comes with wealthy status he needed within the tribe.

Muhammad's original teachings were founded on the concept of a single God and were in direct contrast to the dominant religion then being practiced in Mecca. A recurrent theme in the Quran and other writings is Muhammad's distaste for the polytheists and his relative benevolence towards fellow monotheists and those who were called "people of the book" to include Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Fundamentally, Muhammad and his Muslim followers viewed these latter groups as all part of God's people if they would only follow God's teaching as revealed through his newest apostle. The intent was for a religious awakening amongst God's people away from the dark ages, or *jahiliyya* of the pre-Islamic period where

people would “emphasize only the cruelty, barbarism, and anarchy that Islam wished to associate with Arabia before the coming of Muhammad and the Quran.”<sup>5</sup>

This earlier form of ignorance is better stated by an early follower of Muhammad, Ja’far b. Abu Talib, who is responding to critics of his religion after his decision to leave Mecca for Assyria in the face of continued oppression by the Quraysh:

O King, we were an uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating guests badly, and our strong devoured our weak. Thus we were until God sent us an apostle whose lineage, truth, trustworthiness, and clemency we know. He summoned us to acknowledge God’s unity and to worship him and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshipped. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and kindly hospitality, and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed....Thereupon our people attacked us, treated us harshly and seduced us from our faith to try to make us go back to the worship of idols instead of the worship of God, and to regard as lawful the evil deeds we once committed. So when they got the better of us, treated us unjustly and circumscribed our lives, and came between us and our religion, we came to your country...<sup>6</sup>

There are many themes to come back to in this discourse but a couple must be highlighted here to describe Muhammad’s early message. These include the recognition of their uncivilized ways, the worship of a single God, the necessity of keeping kinship ties, and finally the notion that their behavior was in self defense because of how “our people” had “attacked us” and “treated us harshly.”

The sources are conflicting on how much influence Christianity and Judaism had on Muhammad since, even as their moniker “people of the book” implies, he was illiterate and probably never read the Scriptures or the Torah. However, the nomadic lifestyle and oral traditions of the times most likely put him into frequent contact with these religions and it thus must be concluded that these theologies would have significant influence on his own teaching. Indeed, as one scholar mentions, Muhammad’s historical context is critical in understanding the

“inflexible of purpose” of his views and yet his willingness to be “diplomatic almost to the verge of dishonesty” to the “establishment of the worship of the One God in Medinah and all Arabia.”<sup>7</sup>

Muhammad’s inclusion of these similar religions would be foundational to the eventual concept of Islamic warfare. On one hand he was inflexible towards the polytheists of the established religions yet his attitude towards monotheists was vastly different.

Those among his first converts, however, outside of his wife Khadija can be categorized into three classes. The first were younger sons of the best families in Mecca, like Khadija, who were closely related to people who could wield great power within their respective tribes. Second were younger men from other families of weaker clans who were drawn to the Muslim message possibly for economic motivations. The third group included men outside of the clan system and therefore not directly affiliated with any particular confederacy or alliance.<sup>8</sup> Early on we can already see a direct relationship between economic, political, and tribal influences in following Muhammad’s religion.

Islam would gain some momentum amongst the Meccans. But it would lose some steam as Muhammad met strong resistance while attempting to establish his following amongst the many tribes. At this point he begins the transition of his ministry from Mecca to Medina. This emigration, or *hijra*, forms a critical period in the Islamic faith and the Muslim calendar is based on Muhammad’s subsequent transition from one locale to the other. This transition begs the question, why did he have to leave Mecca for Medina? Bell surmises that the wealthy surrounding Christian lands provided inspiration for Arabs towards a better way of life. He further supposes that Mecca may have felt content to profit from its relative heightened importance with regard to religion and wanted to hold on to their customary rituals while the people of Medina were more open to seeing their current religion falter. This latter may have

merit as the adaptation of the Ka'bah as the center of Muslim worship which was originally a Medianian pagan ritual. Either way, without Muhammad's "adroit use of the influence which came to him and the military force which he built upon it, the Arabs would not have been united under the banner of Islam..."<sup>9</sup>

Another view of Muhammad's emigration to Medina is provided by Watt through 'Urwah, an early companion of Muhammad, where three reasons are provided in a letter. First, the denunciation of worshipping idols and attacking polytheism "marked the critical stage in the relation of Muhammad to the leaders of Quraysh"<sup>10</sup> Second, this opposition sparked high-ranking Quraysh members to rebuke him and ostracize Muhammad within his own tribe. This led to the third reason, Muhammad's insistence to many of the early Muslims to go to Abyssinia and await further instructions there, which did nothing but infuriate the Meccan leadership even more. This latter action preceded Talib's remarks to the Abyssinian Negus quoted above.

Medina, or Yathrib as it was known before Muhammad's *hijra*, was under the control of the Ansar tribe with two main clans divided into the Aws and Khazraj along with other groups known to be Jewish. The two clans, just prior to the *hijra*, had restored an uneasy political balance through the "so-called war of Hatib" which was the culmination of years of frequent feuds with one another.<sup>11</sup> According to Watt, Medina was experiencing much of the same problems that afflicted Mecca at the time, which was the "incompatibility of nomadic standards and customs – in fine, nomadic ideology – with life in a settled community."<sup>12</sup> It was, perhaps, this incompatibility and constant lack of unity which made Medina the perfect location for Muhammad to consolidate his power and further his message in the approximately two years until Badr.

### *Geographical Context*

Before continuing with the events and circumstances leading to Badr, a small detour into the geographical context of the area in question is important. First, a quick survey on Arabia and the lifestyle which it produced in the seventh century will be followed by an explanation on the corresponding importance of Mecca and Medina to the early Islamic faith. Then, a look at the various trade routes Muhammad may have been in contact with will set the stage for our causal factors surrounding the Battle of Badr.

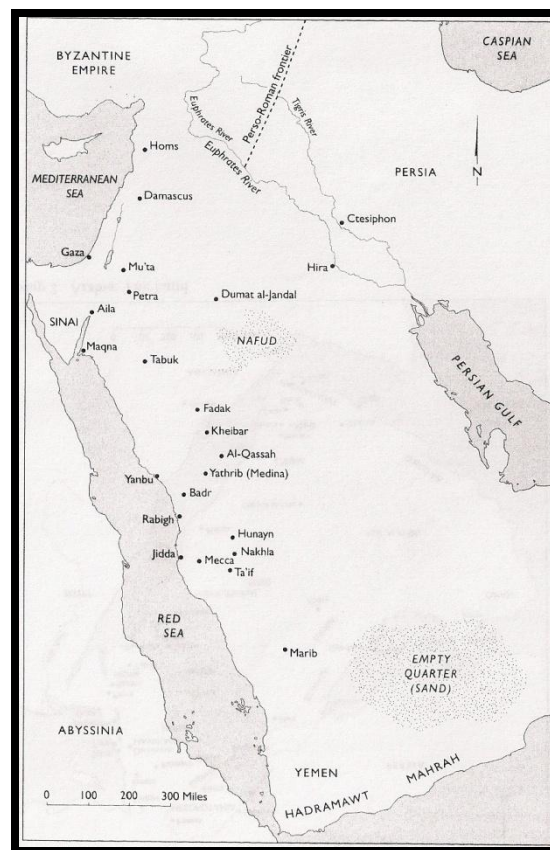


Figure 1. Arabian Peninsula

The Arabian Peninsula with important places during the time of Muhammad.<sup>13</sup>

The Middle East is often referred, right or wrong, as the “cradle of civilization” and conjures up images of a vast desert with numerous nomadic groups riding on the backs of

camels.<sup>14</sup> Not quite east yet with a significant influence on matters in the west, the Middle East is the proverbial bridge that provides the cross-roads of major trade routes between the two regions. Supposedly invented by the American naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan, it was originally used to distinguish the area between Arabia and India but was eventually used to include the Arabian Peninsula and the region in general.<sup>15</sup>

Generally speaking, the Arabian Desert is divided into two categories. The first is the waterless land in summer time that produces lush vegetation for camels after a heavy rainfall. The people in this region are heavily dependent, more so than usual, on the camel for the moisture and sustenance it provides during the extended dry seasons. The second region is one that provides perennial trees and shrubs where camels can graze and major crops can be raised on a relatively consistent basis. Here, people are dependent on systems of wells where camels and humans alike can drink and store water for later purposes.

The cities of Mecca and Medina are described as “islands in a sea of desert” and were regarded as economic centers of trade on the peninsula. Mecca belonged to the first category of desert and was a significant trading location existing mainly as an economic distribution center with markets and no real product to offer. Medina, conversely, belonged to the second type of desert and was a “large and flourishing oasis”<sup>16</sup> in the time of Muhammad with several Jewish agricultural colonies living amongst their Arab neighbors.

Trade routes naturally connected the region with the outside world and Mecca was at the center of these routes from Yemen to Syria and Abyssinia to Iraq where “the nomad came for goods brought from the four points of the compass by caravan.”<sup>17</sup> These economic trade routes necessitated the nomadic lifestyle where it became necessary to travel from one part of the desert to another while frequently visiting the larger cities and economic centers to conduct business.

Because of this travel, thievery, banditry, and general violence were not uncommon where the stronger herdsmen usually survived over the sedentary farmers. Interestingly enough, one of the earliest recorded acts of violence in the region comes from the book of Genesis where Cain, the farmer, kills his brother, the herdsmen, in a classic example of the frailty of border security combined with tribal and familial warfare.<sup>18</sup>

With the framework of Muhammad's early rise to power and the land he established it in, we will now turn to the leading causal factors of Badr. Specifically, more detail will be given to the cultural background in the period considered including tribal allegiances, concepts of warfare, and some economic factors this caused. A background of how Islam played a role in the political affairs of the time is essential in understanding factors leading up to Badr including the various pacts and treaties that were made in the face of overwhelming tribal factions. Finally, Islam has grown into a world religion and the Quran and Hadith have much to say about the transition period surrounding the *hijra* and eventually Badr.

### **Culture & Badr**

One of the many obstacles facing Muhammad as he attempted to consolidate his power and spread his message in Medina was the varying cultural differences inherent in a tribal society. This section will focus on some of those cultural issues as they relate to warfare and, specifically, events leading to Badr. This paper will now look at some dominant features of Arabian tribal societies during the time of Muhammad and attempt to decipher some key aspects of its character as it relates to warfare. Among these characteristics are fate and martyrdom, tribal solidarity, and the concept of revenge and honor. It is often difficult to draw a distinct line between politics and tribal allegiances in Arabian culture and great care will be used in differentiating between the two here. Although politics and tribes are inextricably linked, the political landscape facing Muhammad will be discussed in a later section.

#### *Fate & Martyrdom*

The first concept to explore is that of fate and martyrdom in pre-Islamic Arabia and its relation to Badr. No attempt is made to bring about any discourse into the many intricacies of fatalism as it pertains to the religion of Islam, however, but focus will be placed on the specific influence to the fighting at Badr. The term martyrdom can be defined as “the suffering of death on account of adherence to a cause and especially to one's religious faith” while fate is “an inevitable and often adverse outcome, condition, or end.”<sup>19</sup> The definitions are different but the concepts Muhammad propagated and the context in which he did so make the two relevant. Muhammad used the pre-Islamic concept of fate as an idea to exploit through martyrdom realized at the Battle of Badr.



Early Arabian poetry is one area where the influences of the established culture are seen on Islamic beliefs. The idea of death to pre-Islamic poets, like every human in history, was an outcome that could not be avoided and must be dealt with eventually:

*The young man runs, but his fated death reaches him  
Every day brings the fixed term nearer to him  
I know that my day will once reach me  
And I shall not care for my world any more*<sup>20</sup>

One of the main differences between the pre-Islamic idea of death and that of the Islamic faith has to do with the afterlife. Muhammad wanted to give the Arabs around him reasons to fight because “the polytheist does not hope for raising after death so he wants to live long”<sup>21</sup> but, under his idea of martyrdom, those who died for the cause of God could live forever.<sup>22</sup> The Quran builds on fate and links it to the afterlife in *Sura 55:26* saying, “all those upon earth pass away; eternal is the face of thy Lord in glory and honor.”

Another interesting bridge between pre-Islamic thoughts on fate and eventual Muslim conceptions of the idea is brought forth in unique poetic themes. By using the owl as a central motif, Homerin describes its use as “associated with specific views of life, death, and afterlife, thus becoming an important religious symbol to the ancient Arabs...”<sup>23</sup> By comparing semantic messages across time and cultures in using anthropologic methods, we can correlate certain cultural ideas from one group of people to another. In later Arabic poetry, another example is found in a poem by Al-Hamasah in a line describing bereavement and despair: “If only I knew what Mukhariq will say when my owl answers the screeching owls, and I am lowered into a deep shaft, its dust pouring upon me, in whose moist earth I’m long to stay...”<sup>24</sup> The particular use of the owl is irrelevant to our discussion but what is important is the correlation of the idea of fate and the way in which Muhammad leveraged this idea into martyrdom and the afterlife in his religious views.

The idea of martyrdom in Islamic doctrine may have some roots in other monotheist traditions and, as we have seen, Muhammad undoubtedly was influenced by some existing thoughts by the people of Arabia.<sup>25</sup> He may have received some persuasion from the Christian idea of martyrdom which combines the idea of confession with the Greek form of the word “witnesses in law.” The Quran is not clear on distinguishing between those who are killed in battle as opposed to others in reaching the afterlife, but it is clear that it is mentioned as a core belief to those who are taking part in *jihad* and, as we shall see, ascribes a higher form of paradise to those killed in battle. This is the primary difference between Christian ideas of martyrdom and those of Islam, the idea that instead of a metaphorical “soldier of God” there are actual soldiers who take up arms and die in the cause of their religion. In the *hadith*, the concept of martyrdom is laid out in even greater detail and is full of examples of rich rewards to those who die in battle. Bonner concludes that “the Islamic community admired its martyrs as models of physical courage” and “relentless striving (*jihad*)” in military campaigns.

While at Badr, Muhammad was not initially in the fight but, Ishaq says, after the first two Muslims were killed he eventually showed up on the battlefield saying, “By God...no man will be slain this day fighting against them (the Meccans) with steadfast courage advancing not retreating but God will cause him to enter Paradise.”<sup>26</sup> To give the early Muslims confidence in their newfound faith, ideas regarding death centered on courage in facing the inevitable. This courage is exemplified in the poem below and leads to the concept of honor and revenge:

*O my friends, a respected death  
Is better than an illusory refuge;  
Anxiety does not ward off the decree  
But endurance is a cause of victory.  
Death is better than vileness,  
And having death before oneself is better than having it behind.  
Thus, courage! There is no escape from death.*<sup>27</sup>

*Honor & Revenge*

The nomadic lifestyle necessitated by the Arabian Desert forced the average person to exhibit a level of courage perhaps a bit higher than those with a sedentary lifestyle. Raiding was common and, to a certain extent, expected. It was, for example, commonplace to allow banditry so long as the women were left unhurt. Accordingly, Watt tells us that the “nomad is usually the better fighter” and the “merchants are ready to pay a desert tribe for the protection of their homesteads and herds and for the safe passage of their caravans.”<sup>28</sup> This became a source of consistent income for the various nomadic groups and their loyalty generally aligned with the merchant who would pay the most.

The practice of revenge could eventually lead to conflict and a system would have to be in place to pay for the loss of property or treasure. Therefore, a form of retribution would become necessary. This “eye for an eye” mentality found in the Old Testament may have contributed to the political instability and rampant tribal infighting so common during the period in question. The principle of the blood-feud was used as a natural way of maintaining a semblance of order in a fashion which seems somewhat barbarous to the “civilized” ways of today. It essentially consists within a tribal or clan society where, literally, if a life is taken by an outsider that clan or kin group must exact the same punishment on the individual or offending clan responsible. It becomes a communal responsibility and when combined with the complicated intricacies of tribal allegiances, it can generate widespread warfare and violence.

One such example provided by Watt is the capture of two Muslims at ar-Raji. According to Ishaq, they were sent to Mecca to preach Islam but were eventually taken captive by nomads along the way. Once in captivity at Mecca, some Quraysh family members who fought at Badr and had family killed there purchased their freedom and then proceeded to kill them outright.

While no binding laws existed to enforce such actions, and no one to enforce them if there had been, this practice presumably satisfied the groups in question. They would go about in relative peace knowing their debts had been paid.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, if it was impossible to exact life out of an offending person a form of payment through a third party arbiter was seen as an acceptable alternative. This practice was utilized by Muhammad to cover circumstances where taking a life was not politically viable. When a member of the Ansari tribe accidentally killed another, the brother of the dead approached Muhammad to seek retribution for his losses. He became the arbiter of the situation and ordered the blood debt paid. However, it didn't seem to satisfy the requirement as the brother killed the attacker anyway saying,

I fetched him a stroke in vengeance  
Which drew blood that ebbed and flowed  
I said as the wrinkles of death covered him  
'You can't be safe from B. Baker when they are wronged'<sup>30</sup>

Muhammad translated this communal, kinship requirement of a blood tax into his conception of the new Muslim community as a whole he called the *ummah*. Now retribution was not limited or restricted along tribal or kinship lines but was extended under the overarching umbrella of Muslims as a group. According to the Constitution of Medina,<sup>31</sup> Muhammad and "the believers exact vengeance for one another where a man gives his blood in the way of God."<sup>32</sup> Like other customs and patterns of behavior Muhammad confronted and could not change, he used this idea of retribution to his advantage and demanded it amongst his followers.

The need for security in the nomadic lifestyle was tied up in this blood tax and is a social organizational phenomenon Salzman calls "balanced opposition."<sup>33</sup> In this construct, "everybody is a member of a nested set of kin groups" and if a confrontation exists, the fear of retribution from a similar sized tribe acts as a sort of deterrent for future aggression. But when

violence did erupt, the concept of honor is embedded in the fulfillment of these obligations. Furthermore, a third party arbiter such as the role Muhammad would play would also be seen as an honorable explanation for resolving disputes. If an outsider were to create a problem for a group in opposition to another, it became honorable for the warring tribes to turn their attention to a foreigner and thereby maintain their reputation in this manner.<sup>34</sup>

### *Tribal Solidarity*

Muhammad was able to leverage the concepts of retribution and martyrdom into his creation of the *ummah* where the people of Islam were now bound by a common religion that went beyond mere blood relation. By creating a new tribe, he was also able to bring this coalition towards *jihad* against foreign invaders and, as at Badr, for offensive operations. This cultural phenomenon of tribal solidarity was perhaps the most critical component of Muhammad's overarching strategy. We have already discussed some aspect of the interrelationships amongst the Arabian tribes in the discussion on retribution, but the commonality of their actions was not limited to just fighting.

Tribal solidarity amongst the Arabs was borne out of necessity in part because of economics and geography. The common perception of the majority of the settlements in Arabia at the time of Muhammad were nomadic, but in actuality most lived in settled areas dominated by markets, religious centers, and areas of commerce. As was previously mentioned, those areas that were fortunate enough to have sufficient water supplies maintained sedentary civilizations focusing on trading with nomadic tribes from the surrounding desert. These desert tribes formed a diverse background depending on the terrain of their inhabitation.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, whether an Arab lived in a sedentary agricultural location in the Yemen, or a trading post like Mecca, or wandered in the arid desert they all had a common form of lifestyle

epitomized in tribal organization. These people belonged “to several interrelated groups that expressed membership in terms of real or supposed kinship in the paternal line”<sup>36</sup> and gained social standing and received security through these relationships. Through this paternal line the tribal members formed even further bonds with other tribes expressed as a form of distant kinship to form even larger security attachments. These attachments, however, were not always through strictly relational or blood lines. As a natural phenomenon to a culture in constant movement, the tribal makeup was also in constant flux where outsiders would assimilate with various tribes creating even bigger units.

This tribal solidarity did not necessarily translate into any semblance of law or organization. On the contrary, until Muhammad united them under the banner of Islam “no authority to legislate or enforce universal rules beyond the limits of the kinship group, and even within the kinship group no formal system of law developed beyond that of cultural expectations of behavior.”<sup>37</sup> Western notions of social norms and behaviors simply did not exist and the only matter of recourse was in the strength of the tribe itself and its threat of retaliation as a means of security. Therefore, “the larger the extended kinship group from which support was garnered, the more secure and powerful the group”<sup>38</sup> and the various complex political struggles between religious leaders, sedentary economic centers, and nomadic herdsmen focused on this ability to bring others into their fold. Even within this struggle for group solidarity, inside tribes there would be “smaller groups intensely jealous of one another, and usually pursuing contrary policies”<sup>39</sup> in order to gain ultimate control of the tribe.

While tribal raiding necessitated strong leadership in martial values, the concept of religious tribes played a vital role in the development of tribal solidarity and Muhammad’s ascendance to power. These religious tribes would often maintain control of the trading centers

and would serve as honorable arbiters for any feuding tribes. Nomadic tribes would listen to them out of fear for supernatural retribution to their crops while sedentary tribes would respect their decisions as noble and just.<sup>40</sup> The tribes that were either headed by warrior nomads or sedentary religious aristocracies were constantly at odds with another over regional domination. Muhammad, through his victory at Badr, combined the warrior ethos with a religious aristocratic air to launch his Islamic state.<sup>41</sup>

### **Politics & Badr**

Politics as thought of today are a relatively foreign concept for the Middle East until recently. The current construct of nation-states, nationhood, and nationalism with associated lines of demarcation are still difficult to grasp amongst some countries to this day. It is no surprise, therefore, that Muhammad was faced with perplexing issues of unity among the early Muslims and had to figure out a way to bring them together in some sort of political manner. Even still, “the idea that the Arabs constituted a unity existed, but only in a rudimentary form. It was through the achievements of Muhammad himself that it became more explicitly held.”<sup>42</sup> This section will highlight some of those achievements Muhammad was able to exploit at Badr, specifically the Constitution of Medina, the meetings at Aqaba, and the idea of the *ummah* as a political entity.

#### *Constitution of Medina*

It is almost impossible to separate the notion of tribes and political power as the basic difference between the two is almost negligible from the Arabian standpoint and time period in question. In fact, Watt tells us that “the tribe or confederation of tribes was the highest political unit”<sup>43</sup> and to separate the two would do no good anyhow. At the time of Muhammad’s rise to power in Mecca, the Quraysh tribe had gained control of the city through control of economic centers and religious practices. The following chart shows the Quraysh clan during the height of Muhammad’s power struggle at Mecca<sup>44</sup>:



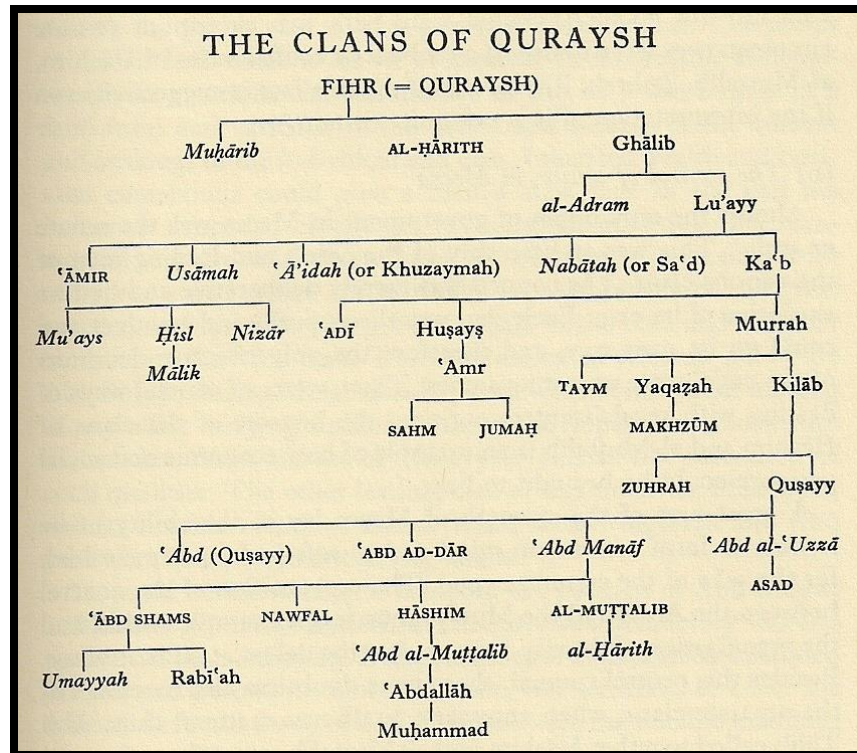


Figure 2. Clans of Quraysh

The power of an individual clan typically came from their overall economic worth and the martial qualities of the individual tribal members. As previously noted, no formal laws or regulations existed amongst the tribes and the only sure way to reach any sort of agreements were through unanimous decisions through senatorial representation. These senates were not what modern readers would regard as a representative government, but were instead a conglomeration of tribal leaders who would meet to discuss economic issues that affected the people in their tribe in general. Under these circumstances, it is clear to see why the blood tax was an important and effective means of maintaining order among feuding tribes.

Therefore, the tribe who had the primacy of military prowess and abilities gained the advantage in achieving power because they were able to extend their protection to other tribes while simultaneously strengthening their economic base. Tribal solidarity was extended through political confederacies that would provide the safest means of travel when trading in various

parts of Arabia. The Quraysh were able to expand their military might by promising protection through their skillful and shrewd diplomatic maneuvering.

Muhammad was obviously aware of the importance to garner support from neighboring tribes and the Constitution of Medina may be seen as his first venture into the world of diplomacy. Sources differ as to when the document<sup>45</sup> was written but its significance is not in the timely placement in history, rather in the ideas it expresses to affect Muhammad's goals. The document implies the supremacy of Muhammad as the chief executive of the various clans and groups who were signatory to the agreement in the same fashion of a tribal chief over their own clan. All authority for reconciling disputes that came up amongst the tribes was given to Muhammad in the phrase "whenever you differ about a matter it must be referred to God and to Muhammad."<sup>46</sup>

Muhammad's role as chief executive of the various clans did not happen overnight and the reference to God *and* Muhammad are important because it combined his authority of a politician within a tribe to his religious command of the new believers. Watt argues that even though the constitution spelled out significant roles given to Muhammad, at this time he was just another clan leader with religious authority and "probably first became a force in the politics of Medina after his military success at Badr."<sup>47</sup> The significance of Badr as a seminal event in Muhammad's rise to power is clearly seen in his ability here to leverage that victory with previously established roles as a political and religious leader. Donner echoes the difficulty in consolidating political power in seventh century Arabia stating that "it was not the means of extending dominance that were lacking, but the means of giving the tribal confederation, once built, a measure of cohesiveness."<sup>48</sup> Muhammad's religious ideology and military victory at Badr provided the means towards achieving a unified Islamic state.

*The Pledges of Aqaba*

The First Pledge of Aqaba directly led to the *hijra*, or Muhammad's emigration from Mecca to Medina, which "has the connotation not of geographical transference, but of separation from one's family and clan and attachment to others"<sup>49</sup> and has hugely significant cultural and political connotations in seventh century Arabia. The implication of this event cannot be understated as Muslims calculate time based on this experience. Those who accompanied Muhammad on the *hijra* were termed Emigrants and held special favor amongst their new Muslim community.

Prior to the *hijra* there had to be conditions in place for Muhammad to safely and successfully transition his power from Mecca to Medina. This was realized through the meeting of "twelve Helpers" who "attended the fair and met at al-Aqaba"<sup>50</sup> They were the first of the *Ansar* to pledge their allegiance to Muhammad and were from powerful Medinian tribes. Ishaq calls it the "pledge of women" and recounts that one of the leaders called it a pledge "to the prophet after the manner of women and that was before war was enjoined..."<sup>51</sup> The term *Ansar* is derived from the verb with the connotation of "helping a person wronged against his enemy"<sup>52</sup> and signifies a people previously unaffiliated with Muhammad's religious exhortations willing to join him in a political alliance.

The second pledge of Aqaba between Muhammad and the *Ansar* is known as the "Pledge of War" and is seen as the beginning of the permission to wage offensive warfare in the name of God. This meeting was said to occur "when God intended to honor them and to help His apostle and to strengthen Islam and to humiliate heathenism and its devotees"<sup>53</sup> and was specifically aimed at solidifying the groundwork for Muhammad's move to Medina and his repudiation of the polytheists in Mecca. Muhammad made a direct militant appeal to those assembled calling

for their “allegiance on the basis that you protect me as you would your women and children.”

Some of the *Ansari* were afraid that once victory over the Meccans was achieved Muhammad would leave them and move on to other interests. Muhammad, however, assured them that this was the beginning of a lasting agreement with the statement, “I will war against them that war against you and be at peace with those at peace with you.”<sup>54</sup> This military pledge is seen from Ishaq in his account of God’s order to the apostle to fight:

The apostle had not been given permission to fight or allowed to shed blood before the second Aqaba. He had simply been ordered to call men to God and to endure insult and forgive the ignorant. The Quraysh had persecuted his followers, seducing some from their religion, and exiling others from their country. They had to choose whether to give up their religion, be maltreated at home, or to flee the country, some to Abyssinia, others to Medina. When Quraysh became insolent towards God and rejected His gracious purpose, accused His prophet of lying, and ill treated and exiled those who served Him and proclaimed His unity, believed in His prophet, and held fast to His religion, He gave permission to His apostle to fight and to protect himself against those who wronged them and treated them badly. The first verse which was sent down on this subject...was: ‘Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged. God is well able to help them, - those who have been driven out of their houses without right only because they said God is our Lord....’<sup>55</sup> The meaning is: ‘I have allowed them to fight only because they have been unjustly treated while their sole offense against men has been that they worship God....’ Then God sent down to him: ‘Fight them so that there be no more seduction,’<sup>56</sup> until no believer is seduced from his religion. ‘And the religion is God’s [and] until God alone is worshipped.’<sup>57</sup>

Muhammad’s consolidation with the *Ansari* tribes led to the unification of the Meccans in their attempt to expel Muhammad from Mecca towards Medina. The nearly 75 Muslims who accompanied Muhammad and who were present at the second pledge of Aqaba made it clear he was going to be a political force to reckon with as he gained momentum towards Medina. The conditions of Medina were ripe for Muhammad to take control of the oasis as rampant violence and economic instability were becoming more and more commonplace for the people there. They were ready for someone of charisma and character to take control and Muhammad proved

to be a valuable commodity from a political and religious standpoint to rescue the Medinians from the situation they had grown accustomed to.<sup>58</sup>

### *The Ummah as a Political Entity*

The constitution of Medina called for a coalition between the prophet, “the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who followed them and joined them and labored with them. They are one community (*umma*) to the exclusion of all men”<sup>59</sup> As noted above, the dominant political structure of the Arabs during Muhammad’s time was the tribe and the intricate tribal relationships based on loose systems of confederation promising protection, retribution, and economic assistance. The significance of Muhammad assuming leadership over numerous tribes lay in his assumption of power without any kinship ties to any of the subject people. Rather, his authority came strictly from a religious basis and through this extended his rule beyond mere blood affiliations.

According to Muhammad, this authority does not come from him directly but instead is bestowed on him through God as his messenger and final prophet. It is God’s authority and message renouncing idol worship and Arabian pagan rituals that Muhammad formulates his political basis around. Because he believed God’s message was to reach all mankind, the *umma* would be extended likewise to all who accepted his teaching and followed his path.

Furthermore, all previously established cultural customs and practices then associated with tribal relationships followed easily into Muhammad’s “global” tribe concept. Not altogether theocratic yet not altogether Arabian, it is a combination of a political necessity with established cultural values into a newfound religious community.

The inclusion of Medinian Jews cannot be understated to Muhammad’s consolidation of political power in his early days. His relative tolerance towards the Jewish community may be

partly religious and partly political. The religious similarities can be found in the Quranic verse that links Islam with Judaism where “He has established for you the same religion that He enjoined on Noah – and which we revealed to you – and that He enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus...”<sup>60</sup> The political necessity of an alliance appears obvious on the surface and the Jewish inclusion in the constitution and *ummah* is evidence of their importance. Originally, however, the Jews rejected Muhammad’s claims and it wasn’t until after his power increased there did the Muslims turn their animosities towards the Jews living in Medina.<sup>61</sup>

Denny contends that the original intent of the Constitution of Medina did not intend to include Jews in the *ummah* at all. Since the “Constitution was very much a political-military document of agreement,”<sup>62</sup> their inclusion was strictly a matter of convenience for Muhammad to extend his power to the existing tribes in Medina. The contradictions between the statements that “to the Jew who follows us belong help and equality” with “The Jews...are one community with the believers (the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs)”<sup>63</sup> only solidifies Muhammad’s attempt to use the *ummah* as a political necessity fashioned on religious ideology. Watt does not call this a contradiction at all, but rather a “development dictated by circumstances”<sup>64</sup> due to the placement of the articles in time.

The concept of the *ummah* is critical in context with the second meeting of Aqaba and eventually events at Badr because it joined members of different clans and, as we have seen, different faiths together. Through this new tribe, they “bound themselves to war against all...while [Muhammad] promised them for faithful service thus the reward of paradise.”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of the Quraysh in the Medina agreement as signatories to receive protection signifies Muhammad’s break with members of his own kin while simultaneously accepting them as believers in Islam.

### **Religion & Badr**

This will not be a discourse on the Islamic foundations of warfare. Too many books, articles, and rhetoric have been given trying to understand what the Muslim concept of violence is or is not and nothing here could add significantly to that discussion. However, what can be added here is a conglomeration of attitudes and beliefs associated with Islam as it relates to the Battle of Badr. It will, however, lay out some key definitions that are critical to understanding some motives before turning to the Quran and Hadith and what they have to say about Badr.

#### *Jihad, Dar al-Harb, & Dar al-Islam*

First, it is necessary to lay a basic foundation of some key terms in Muslim jurisprudence regarding warfare. Perhaps the most commonly misunderstood word in Muslim vernacular to western ears is the term *jihad*. Since this is not intended to be the final say on any religious fundamentals, we will only scratch the surface on the meaning of this difficult concept. The concept of *jihad* is important to the discussion of Badr because, as offered here, that battle was the first instance of Muhammad's overtly offensive militant attempt at disseminating his religious ideology. Prior to Badr and even before the second meeting at Aqaba, Muhammad was not yet given permission to wage warfare in the name of God, presumably because the opportunity did not yet exist.

The term *jihad* can be defined as "an effort directed towards a determined objective" and has the connotation of a "greater" *jihad* and a "lesser" *jihad*.<sup>66</sup> The latter is seen as this effort, or struggle, directed towards the physical realm while on earth while the former is aimed at the spiritual opposition for the favor of God and the hereafter. Furthermore, "*jihad* consists of military action with the object of the expansion of Islam and, if need be, of its defense."<sup>67</sup> This

form of military action is seen as a sense of duty amongst the greater Muslim community, the *ummah*, and is the only form of warfare permissible and sanctioned in Islamic theory. This duty is a “good” and just duty in that its primary aim is to rid the world of evil religions and people who have chosen not to accept the Muslim faith.

*Dar al-Harb*, or house of war, is “the conventional formula derived from the logical development of the idea of *jihad* when it ceased to be the struggle for survival of a small community, becoming instead the basis of the ‘law of nations’ in the Muslim State.”<sup>68</sup> This house of war gives Muslims the permission to wage holy war against nations who, after hearing the call to the Islamic faith, refuse to convert. Furthermore, it is called a “missionary war” where the Quran makes it a major duty of believers to be waged against unbelievers wherever they are found with the ultimate aim of peace under Islamic rule.

*Dar al-Islam* is “‘the Land of Islam’ or, more simply, in Muslim authors, ‘our Country’ and is the whole territory in which the law of Islam prevails.”<sup>69</sup> This concept is an extension of the earlier formation of the *ummah* discussed above. This house of Islam, as it is sometimes called, provided protection to those who lived in countries where the law of Islam was the law of the state and extended mainly to the People of the Book as *dhimmis*. According to classical Islamic doctrine, everything outside *Dar al-Islam* is war unless, as in the case of the *dhimmis*, the subjects pay the *jizyah*, or poll tax to their Muslim rulers.

The importance of these three concepts, *jihad*, *Dar al-Islam*, and *Dar al-Harb* lie in their relation to Badr as a seminal event in Islamic history. As Peters states, “the origin of the concept of *jihad* goes back to the wars fought by the Prophet Muhammad and...it is clear that the concept was influenced by the ideas of war among the pre-Islamic Northern Arabic tribes.”<sup>70</sup> Prior to Badr and prior to any cohesive alliance that gave the early Muslims the means necessary to wage



war, *jihad* existed only in a defensive posture against the Meccans and Quraysh who were constantly persecuting Muhammad and his followers. With the formation of the *ummah*, there could now be a division amongst believers and non-believers into *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*, respectively. Badr provided the vehicle to exhort the early followers towards striving for God's will through a "holy war" against those who didn't follow the Muslim faith.

### *The Quran & Badr*

There are numerous verses in the Quran which either directly or indirectly deals with the Battle of Badr including 75 in the entire eighth *Sura* discussing the concept of booty or spoils of war. One significant verse outside of these *Sura* was said to be revealed after Badr but before Uhud: "And Allah certainly did assist you at Badr when you were weak; be careful of (your duty to) Allah then, that you may give thanks."<sup>71</sup> This latter verse was presumably revealed to give the Muslims further confidence in their ability to defeat the Meccans again as they had done previously at Badr.

The eighth *Sura*, however, provides remarkable insight into the importance the Quran places on the battle and its subsequent place in Muslim religious thought. The title itself, *al-anfal*<sup>72</sup> or "spoils of war," indicates how deeply important violence was to become for future generations of Muslims as an entire chapter of holy scripture is devoted to the topic. In this collection of revelations future generations are given guidance on how to deal with some of the problems created by battle, specifically the booty the Muslim army acquired from their Quraysh enemy. In some English translations, they are not actually spoils of war but are the "bounties of Allah." Verses 8:1 and 8:41 address these spoils directly:

*They ask you about the windfalls. Say: The windfalls are for Allah and the Messenger. So be careful of (your duty to) Allah and set aright matters of your difference, and obey Allah and His Messenger if you are believers. 8:1*

*And know that whatever thing you gain, a fifth of it is for Allah and for the Messenger and for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, if you believe in Allah and in that which We revealed to Our servant, on the day of distinction, the day on which the two parties met; and Allah has power over all things. 8:41*

The first 41 verses is grouped by the University of Southern California's Center for Jewish-Muslim Engagement into portions which deal with these problems of war. They are exhortations for reminding future armies that they will be successful in battle only with God on their side with such lines from 8:10 as "victory is only from Allah." Verses 11 through 18, however, form almost a narrative of the conditions the armies faced while at Badr. Specifically, verse 11 speaks of the rain that was "sent down from the sky" which made the ground firm for the Muslim army to stand on. The combination of the physical description of the battle with the spiritual commentary is akin to the greater and lesser *jihad* described earlier. Verse 11 reminds Muhammad's army that "He caused calm to fall on you as a security...that he might fortify your hearts and steady (your) footsteps."

Further instruction on battlefield behavior is given in verses 15, 16, and 20 exhorting the believers to "not turn your backs to them (the enemy)" and "whoever shall turn his back to them on that day – unless he turn aside for the sake of fighting or withdraws to a company – then he, indeed, becomes deserving of Allah's wrath..." and "do not turn back from Him while you hear." The remainder of these first 41 verses deals primarily with the spiritual support Allah provides as described here:

*And remember when you were few, deemed weak in the land, fearing lest people might carry you off by force, but He sheltered you and strengthened you with His aid and gave you of the good things that you may give thanks. 8:26*

This verse is alluding to the seemingly insurmountable odds that heavily favored the Quraysh, by most accounts to have been 1,000 to 300. But intertwined amongst the spiritual realm are three key verses which deal with physical application and, perhaps, divine intervention:

*And when our communications are recited to them, they say: We have heard indeed; if we pleased we could say the like of it... 8:31*

*And fight with them until there is no more persecution and religion should be only for Allah... 8:39*

*When your Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them. 8:12*

Verse 31 has been interpreted by centuries of Muslim scholars to be clear evidence of the need to attempt to convert their foes to Islam prior to beginning any hostilities, as was done at Badr. The second verse has also been used by many to indicate the unrelenting need to continue fighting until Islam is the only religion on earth. Finally, verse 12 is an indication of the supposed 1,000 angels sent to the battlefield who helped defeat the Quraysh army.

The next group of verses, 42 – 54, is generally classified as lessons to future Muslims on placing their trust in God in preparing for this and future battles. *Sura* 8:42 hints at the preordainment of the battle claiming that even “if you had mutually made an appointment, you would certainly have broken away from the appointment,” continued in 8:43 that “you would have disputed in the matter” and in 8:44 “in order that Allah might bring about a matter which was to be done.” The grouping of these verses and those that follow make it clear that the Muslims were indeed heavily outnumbered and would understandably be hesitant to commit to battle. It is juxtaposed with different verses and future battles where Muslims are allowed to back down from fighting if they are outnumbered. This notwithstanding, Badr’s example is provided to many as a strengthening to the weak-hearted in any situation, particularly a military engagement.

The remainder of the *Sura*, verses 55 – 75, will only be treated here as it offer future researchers an excellent illustration on the manner with which Muslims are allowed to enter into

treaties with other nations or armies and the treatment of prisoners of war. Specifically, 8:56 cautioned the army at Badr against their unbelieving enemy that “those with whom you make an agreement [might] break their agreement every time.” Further, 8:58 continues the thought from 56 which exhorts “if you fear treachery on the part of the people, then throw them back to them on terms of equality,” exhorting them to guard against treaties while treating the unjust with equality. 8:61 and 62 follow 8:31 cited earlier where if the enemy is “inclined to peace, then incline to it and trust in Allah” but is followed immediately saying “if they intend to deceive you – then surely Allah is sufficient for you” and they are reminded to “exhort the believers to fight” in 8:65.

The Muslim view on the treatment of prisoners of war can be examined through this first pitched battle in Islamic history and we can see early evidence on how they should be held through some key verses of the Quran. This is exemplified in *Sura* 8:67 that says “it is not fit for a prophet that he should take captives unless he has fought and triumphed in the land.” This could be an indication that prisoners are only allowed if total victory is achieved, as at Badr, and should be treated according to 8:70: “say to those of the captives who are in your hands: if Allah knows anything good in your hearts, He will give to you better than that which has been taken away from you and will forgive you.” This is an indication of the Muslim view of continuing to attempt to convert their foe to Islam even after taken prisoner in battle.

The final four verses offer a glimpse into the conduct of those who take place in battle versus those who are unable to due to infirmities, sickness, or other reasons. They specifically talk about guarding one another and protecting those who are believers and those who are not.

*Surely those who believed and fled (their homes) and struggled hard in Allah’s way with their property and their souls, and those who gave shelter and helped – these are guardians of each other; and (as for) those who believed and did not fly, not yours is their guardianship until they fly; and if they seek aid from you in the matter of religion,*

*aid is incumbent on you except against a people between whom and you there is a treaty, and Allah sees what you do. 8:72*

It is not enough just to believe, but it is necessary to struggle with “property and their souls” in order to be protected. If shelter and aid is given, too, this is also seen as worthwhile but Muslims are to give protection only “until they fly” or struggle in Allah’s way.

*And (as for) those who disbelieve, some of them are the guardians of others; if you will not do it, there will be in the land persecution and great mischief. 8:73*

The concept here is that since the enemy is protecting themselves, the Islamic armies must do the same or else there will be confusion, corruption, and mischief amongst the Muslim believers.

*And (as for) those who believed and fled and struggled hard in Allah’s way, and those who gave shelter and helped, these are the believers truly; they shall have forgiveness and honorable provision. 8:74*

This is the provision for those who were unable to go but provided food, clothing, shelter, or other means of assistance to the armies.

*And (as for) those who believed afterwards and fled and struggled hard along with you, they are of you; and the possessors of relationships are nearer to each other in the ordinance of Allah 8:75*

If, after the battle has been fought, the enemy decides to convert they are to be offered full rights as Muslims and are to be “possessors of relationships” with the Islamic community. The preceding four verses can be divided into those who believed by did not help (72), those who are not believers at all and are the enemy (73), those who are “believers truly” (74), and those who were converted at a later time (75). These examples of conduct in battle, along with other concepts such as treaties, prisoners of war, and booty offer insight into the Muslim conduct of warfare.

*The Hadith & Badr*

The *hadith* is a collection of narrations or deeds attributed to Muhammad and are seen as a companion to what the Quran says. The *hadith* is seen as further detailing the proper lifestyle of the Islamic society and are tools for understanding what the Quran says for matters of jurisprudence, history, or law. They are generally classified into different categories based on their authenticity and relationship to Muhammad. Each *hadith* contain the authority for which it was written, or who the saying was attributed to, followed by the actual saying or action it references. Through the history of Islamic civilization, the *hadith* have undergone rigorous evaluation by esteemed Muslim scholars in determining their validity or authenticity. Furthermore, the two main denominations of Islam, Shi'ism and Sunnism, have their own sets of *hadith* which they deem more authentic than others.

For the purposes of this paper, the *hadith* of Sahih Bukhari<sup>73</sup> have been used as his collection is generally regarded within scholarly circles to be the most accurate and most widely accepted. Of the approximately 9,000 *hadith* written by Bukhari, Badr is referenced directly or indirectly 143 times. Many of them are repetitious in nature and do not have much relevance to the battle itself but do describe conduct based on what took place there. One such example is taken from volume 1, book 4, number 241 where the reference is to some major tribal leaders of the Quraysh who were killed at Badr and, as will be shown later, Muhammad spoke to when they were deceased:

*Narrated 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud:*

Once the Prophet was offering prayers at the Ka'ba. Abu Jahl was sitting with some of his companions. One of them said to the others, "Who amongst you will bring the abdominal contents (intestines, etc.) of a camel of Bani so and so and put it on the back of Muhammad, when he prostrates?" The most unfortunate of them got up and brought it. He waited till the Prophet prostrated and then placed it on his back between his shoulders. I was watching but could not do any thing. I

wish I had some people with me to hold out against them. They started laughing and falling on one another. Allah's Apostle was in prostration and he did not lift his head up till Fatima (Prophet's daughter) came and threw that (camel's abdominal contents) away from his back. He raised his head and said thrice, "O Allah! Punish Quraish." So it was hard for Abu Jahl and his companions when the Prophet invoked Allah against them as they had a conviction that the prayers and invocations were accepted in this city (Mecca). The Prophet said, "O Allah! Punish Abu Jahl, 'Utba bin Rabi'a, Shaiba bin Rabi'a, Al-Walid bin 'Utba, Umaiya bin Khalaf, and 'Uqba bin Al Mu'it (and he mentioned the seventh whose name I cannot recall). By Allah in Whose Hands my life is, I saw the dead bodies of those persons who were counted by Allah's Apostle in the Qalib (one of the wells) of Badr.

This particular event occurs repeatedly in Bukhari's collection. The seven leaders mentioned towards the end are seen again through this recording from volume 2, book 23, number 452:

*Narrated Ibn 'Umar:*

The Prophet looked at the people of the well (the well in which the bodies of the pagans killed in the Battle of Badr were thrown) and said, "Have you found true what your Lord promised you?" Somebody said to him, "You are addressing dead people." He replied, "You do not hear better than they but they cannot reply."

This alludes to Muhammad speaking to the various Quraysh clan leaders who were killed in the battle, asking them if their pagan religion was correct or if they were, in fact, burning in the eternal fire. Muhammad addresses the skeptic saying that the dead can indeed hear them, but since they have been doomed they have no means of reply. The following repetitious hadith found in volume 5, book 59, number 314 further enunciates Muhammad's purpose for speaking to the dead while their fate is clarified in number 319:

*Narrated Abu Talha:*

On the day of Badr, the Prophet ordered that the corpses of twenty four leaders of Quraish should be thrown into one of the dirty dry wells of Badr. It was a habit of the Prophet that whenever he conquered some people, he used to stay at the battle-field for three nights. So, on the third day of the battle of Badr, he ordered that his she-camel be saddled, then he set out, and his companions followed him saying among themselves, "Definitely he (i.e. the Prophet) is proceeding for some great purpose." When he halted at the edge of the well, he addressed the corpses of the Quraish infidels by their names and their fathers' names, "O so-and-

so, son of so-and-so and O so-and-so, son of so-and-so! Would it have pleased you if you had obeyed Allah and His Apostle? We have found true what our Lord promised us. Have you too found true what your Lord promised you? "Umar said, "O Allah's Apostle! You are speaking to bodies that have no souls!" Allah's Apostle said, "By Him in Whose Hand Muhammad's soul is, you do not hear, what I say better than they do." (Qatada said, "Allah brought them to life (again) to let them hear him, to reprimand them and slight them and take revenge over them and caused them to feel remorseful and regretful.")

*Narrated Ibn 'Abbas:*

regarding the Statement of Allah:--"Those who have changed Allah's Blessings for disbelief..." (14.28) The people meant here by Allah, are the infidels of Quraish. ('Amr, a sub-narrator said, "Those are (the infidels of) Quraish and Muhammad is Allah's Blessing. Regarding Allah's Statement:"..and have led their people Into the house of destruction? (14.29) Ibn 'Abbas said, "It means the Fire they will suffer from (after their death) on the day of Badr."

The following *ahadith*<sup>74</sup> provide some baselines and further clarifications on future conduct in war derived directly from the battle. On collecting booty and its distribution from volume 3, book 40, number 563 and volume 5, book 59, number 357:

*Narrated Husain bin Ali:*

Ali bin Abi Talib said: "I got a she-camel as my share of the war booty on the day (of the battle) of Badr, and Allah's Apostle gave me another she-camel. I let both of them kneel at the door of one of the Ansar, intending to carry Idhkhair on them to sell it and use its price for my wedding banquet on marrying Fatima. A goldsmith from Bam Qainqa' was with me. Hamza bin 'Abdul-Muttalib was in that house drinking wine and a lady singer was reciting: "O Hamza! (Kill) the (two) fat old she camels (and serve them to your guests)."

*Narrated Qais:*

The Badr warriors were given five thousand (Dirhams) each, yearly. 'Umar said, "I will surely give them more than what I will give to others."

On prisoners of war from volume 4, book 52, number 252 and book 53, number 367:

*Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah:*

When it was the day (of the battle) of Badr, prisoners of war were brought including Al-Abbas who was undressed. The Prophet looked for a shirt for him. It was found that the shirt of 'Abdullah bin Ubai would do, so the Prophet let him



wear it. That was the reason why the Prophet took off and gave his own shirt to 'Abdullah. (The narrator adds, "He had done the Prophet some favor for which the Prophet liked to reward him.")

*Narrated Jubair bin Mutim:*

The Prophet talked about war prisoners of Badr saying, "Had Al-Mutim bin Adi been alive and interceded with me for these mean people, I would have freed them for his sake."

On providing forgiveness for not participating in battle from volume 4, book 53, number 359 and volume 5, book 59, numbers 287 and 291:

*Narrated Ibn 'Umar:*

'Uthman did not join the Badr battle because he was married to one of the daughters of Allah's Apostle and she was ill. So, the Prophet said to him. "You will get a reward and a share (from the war booty) similar to the reward and the share of one who has taken part in the Badr battle."

*Narrated Kab bin Malik:*

I never failed to join Allah's Apostle in any of his Ghazawat except in the Ghazwa of Tabuk. However, I did not take part in the Ghazwa of Badr, but none who failed to take part in it, was blamed, for Allah's Apostle had gone out to meet the caravans of (Quraish, but Allah caused them (i.e. Muslims) to meet their enemy unexpectedly (with no previous intention).

*Narrated Al-Bara:*

I and Ibn 'Umar were considered too young to take part in the battle of Badr.

On martyrdom and the placement of the warriors who fought at Badr, and subsequent *jihad*, in Islamic jurisprudence from volume 4, book 52, number 64 and from volume 5, book 59, number 318 and 327:

*Narrated Anas bin Malik:*

Um Ar-Rubai'bint Al-Bara', the mother of Hartha bin Suraqa came to the Prophet and said, "O Allah's Prophet! Will you tell me about Hartha?" Hartha has been killed (i.e. martyred) on the day of Badr with an arrow thrown by an unidentified person. She added, "If he is in Paradise, I will be patient; otherwise, I will weep

bitterly for him." He said, "O mother of Hartha! There are Gardens in Paradise and your son got the Firdausal-ala (i.e. the best place in Paradise).

*Narrated Anas:*

Haritha was martyred on the day (of the battle) of Badr, and he was a young boy then. His mother came to the Prophet and said, "O Allah's Apostle! You know how dear Haritha is to me. If he is in Paradise, I shall remain patient, and hope for reward from Allah, but if it is not so, then you shall see what I do?" He said, "May Allah be merciful to you! Have you lost your senses? Do you think there is only one Paradise? There are many Paradises and your son is in the (most superior) Paradise of Al-Firdaus."

*Narrated Rifaa:*

(who was one of the Badr warriors) Gabriel came to the Prophet and said, "How do you look upon the warriors of Badr among yourselves?" The Prophet said, "As the best of the Muslims." or said a similar statement. On that, Gabriel said, "And so are the Angels who participated in the Badr (battle)."

On God's role and the divineness of their cause in battle from volume 4, book 52, number 64,

volume 5, book 59, number 330, and volume 6, book 60, number 133:

*Narrated Ibn 'Abbas:*

The Prophet, while in a tent (on the day of the battle of Badr) said, "O Allah! I ask you the fulfillment of Your Covenant and Promise. O Allah! If You wish (to destroy the believers) You will never be worshipped after today." Abu Bakr caught him by the hand and said, "This is sufficient, O Allah's Apostle! You have asked Allah pressingly." The Prophet was clad in his armor at that time. He went out, saying to me: "Their multitude will be put to flight and they will show their backs. Nay, but the Hour is their appointed time (for their full recompense) and that Hour will be more grievous and more bitter (than their worldly failure)." (54.45-46) Khalid said that was on the day of the battle of Badr.

*Narrated Ibn 'Abbas:*

The Prophet said on the day (of the battle) of Badr, "This is Gabriel holding the head of his horse and equipped with arms for the battle."

*Narrated Abdullah (bin Masud):*

On the day of Badr, Al-Miqdad said, "O Allah's Apostle! We do not say to you as the children of Israel said to Moses, 'Go you and your Lord and fight you two; we

are sitting here, (5.24) but (we say). "Proceed, and we are with you." That seemed to delight Allah's Apostle greatly.

On treating nonbelievers who convert to Islam during battle from volume 5, book 59, number 354:

*Narrated 'Ubaidullah bin 'Adi bin Al-Khiyar:*

That Al-Miqdad bin 'Amr Al-Kindi, who was an ally of Bani Zuhra and one of those who fought the battle of Badr together with Allah's Apostle told him that he said to Allah's Apostle, "Suppose I met one of the infidels and we fought, and he struck one of my hands with his sword and cut it off and then took refuge in a tree and said, 'I surrender to Allah (i.e. I have become a Muslim),' could I kill him, O Allah's Apostle, after he had said this?" Allah's Apostle said, "You should not kill him." Al-Miqdad said, "O Allah's Apostle! But he had cut off one of my two hands, and then he had uttered those words?" Allah's Apostle replied, "You should not kill him, for if you kill him, he would be in your position where you had been before killing him, and you would be in his position where he had been before uttering those words."

While the aforementioned practices are good cultural norms to be learned for future Muslim generations, there are many other examples in the ahadith which shed light on the particular question in mind: that of the confluence of culture, politics, and religion at Badr. For example, we have already discussed the importance of the Aqaba agreements and in this hadith we find how critical it really was to the loosely formed coalition Muhammad had built when a member stated, "I would not like to have attended the Badr battle [were it not for] that 'Aqaba pledge'"<sup>75</sup> The same exchange is found in a later hadith by the same narrator, where he "witnessed the night of Al-'Aqaba (pledge) with Allah's Apostle when we pledged for Islam, and I would not exchange it for the Badr battle although the Badr battle is more popular amongst the people than it (i.e. Al-'Aqaba pledge)."<sup>76</sup> The cultural aspect is present, too, in the form of the newfound *ummah* fighting against previously established clans aligned along blood lines. When one of the Quraysh tribal leaders was near death he was reported as saying, "You should not be proud that you have killed me nor I am ashamed of being killed by my own folk."<sup>77</sup>

### **The Battle of Badr**

The narrative now turns to the battle itself and every attempt will be made to reconstruct the events to the maximum extent possible given the source limitations provided above. It is important to first set the stage with regards to the geography and the relative importance the city of Badr had during seventh century Arabian society. Then, some key events which led directly to the encounter at Badr will be discussed as they relate to the actions there. Finally, a description of the events of the battle itself will be followed by the immediate aftermath following the cessation of hostilities.

#### *The Geography of Badr*

The city of Badr, or Badr Hunayn, is a small town southwest of Medina and, according to the Encyclopedia of Islam, was just a night's journey from the coast "at the junction of a road from Medina with the caravan route from Mecca to Syria."<sup>78</sup> It was a market center and a place where a fair was held every year located in a wide plain surrounded by steep hills and sand dunes on either side. According to Hamidullah who wrote a military history on Muhammad and toured the site, the journey on the road from Mecca to Badr is about ten hours on a camel and is "very pleasant, the land being more fertile" than the desert which surrounds it. He also remarks that there is plenty of water and pasture for large numbers of camels at Badr itself and the route is even marked with a thick forest called al-Is.<sup>79</sup>

Badr is situated in a valley with mountains on either side made of accumulated sand and the ground was very soft with some places full of stones and rocks. These hills are referenced in the Quran in sura 8:42 as the "yonder bank" and the "nearer bank." They provided temporary protection to various caravans, especially in this instance of the Quraysh caravan, travelling

through the area. With its somewhat heightened importance as a trading market center, the city of Badr was well equipped with substantial wells to accommodate the various caravans stopping there for provisions or trading.

*Precipitous Events Leading to Badr*

The immediate causes of the confrontation at Badr are difficult to quantify. On one hand it was an inevitable confluence of cultural and political factors manifested in a religious war at an opportune time. Practically speaking, however, the two armies required real reasons for joining battle. Among these tangible reasons are the economic benefits provided by raiding a large caravan, various raids performed by the Muslim base at Medina, and a form of revenge by the Quraysh due to a particular raid at Nakhla.

The specific caravan led by Abu Sufyan will be dealt with below, but it is important to note the significance of obtaining wealth through raiding caravans of neighboring tribes. The situation between the Muslims and Quraysh had deteriorated to such a point that these raids had become relatively commonplace. Furthermore, as was the custom of emigration from one tribe to another, the Muslims left everything behind in Mecca and had to rely on economic support from the tribes in Medina. They were essentially starting over and were rebuilding their economic base by raiding. One author writes about the causes of the battle as the “fears of the...Meccans [coming] true when Meccan trade with Syria was threatened by the Muslims.”<sup>80</sup> Hamidallah, however, takes a different approach than economics and places the blame of the battle on the Meccans through their “political pressure...on the ruler and other influential people of the countries of their refuge”<sup>81</sup> during the emigration. However, he does acknowledge the economic pressure the Muslims applied to the Quraysh during this time which probably provoked the latter tribe to war.

Gabriel puts the raid of Nakhla as a seminal event leading to hostilities at Badr, saying that “Muhammad justified the killings at Nakhla in the name of God”<sup>82</sup> and, by correlation, the other raids undertaken by Muhammad and the Muslims living in Medina. There were a series of raids the Muslim and *Ansar* took part in with Muhammad actually leading a few of them. One in particular was led by an emigrant of Muhammad and took place without the help of any of the *Ansar*. Although no fighting took place, Ishaq records that “the first arrow to be shot in Islam” did occur here. Also significant to this raid was the defection of two Muslim warriors who had accompanied the Quraysh but went back with the Muslims to “whom they really belonged.” In another expedition 30 Muslims (with no *Ansar* again) met 300 from Mecca near the shore. Here we see an intermediary prevent conflict between the two parties from someone “at peace with both parties.”<sup>83</sup>

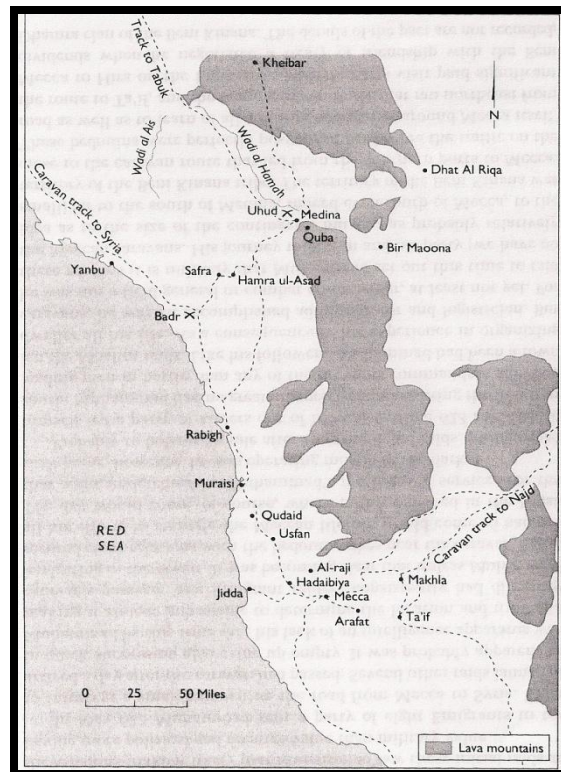


Figure 3. Map of Muslim Raids

This map shows the locations of various raids Muhammad took part in or ordered prior to Badr.<sup>84</sup>

The remaining raids under Muhammad took place without any violence attached to them and seem to have been intended to consolidate his political base, as suggested by Bashumail, with the economic benefits eluding him. The final expedition before the events of Badr was much more significant given the culture of the time. Eight Muslims were sent on a raid with instructions by Muhammad in a letter saying “proceed until you reach Nakhla between Mecca and Al-Ta’if. Lie in wait there for Quraysh and find out for us what they are doing.”<sup>85</sup> Two of the companions had to remain behind while the rest continued on to Nakhla. While the two continued on their own searching for a lost camel, the other six stumbled on a portion of the Quraysh caravan and, Ishaq tells us, talked amongst themselves to figure out their next move. It was the sacred month and killing was a forbidden act common to all Arabian cultures at the time. They soon realized that if they let them go they would enter the forbidden place and they would not be able to attack them either. After some deliberation they attacked, killing one and taking two prisoners while one escaped.

When they returned to Medina and attempted to present the booty to Muhammad, he refused to accept the caravan and the prisoners stating, “I did not order you to fight in the sacred month.”<sup>86</sup> Understandably, the two Muslims were afraid of the consequences of their actions while the Meccans and Jews allied against Muhammad used this incident against them. It was at this time, according to the traditions, that Sura 2:217 was revealed which stated, “They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it. Say: Fighting in it is a grave matter, and hindering (men) from Allah's way and denying Him, and (hindering men from) the Sacred Mosque and turning its people out of it, are still graver with Allah, and persecution is graver than slaughter; and they will not cease fighting with you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can; and whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he dies while an unbeliever--

these it is whose works shall go for nothing in this world and the hereafter, and they are the inmates of the fire; therein they shall abide.” Although the prisoners on each side were eventually returned, the fact that the first man was killed by a Muslim and a significant amount of Quraysh property was gone was not to be taken lightly by the Meccan tribe. This blood debt, as discussed earlier, was a critical component to causing the two armies to meet at Badr.

### *Abu Sufyan's Caravan*

Caravans laden with critical goods travelled from Mecca to Syria about twice a year and were, as previously discussed, only lightly protected against lightly armed bandits and thieves. When a large Quraysh caravan known as the expedition of Al-‘Ashira<sup>87</sup> under the leadership of Abu Sufyan, an experienced and influential military man, set out along the route from Mecca to Syria it was accompanied by about 30 to 40 men. Muhammad and his Muslim army had attempted to raid previous smaller, more localized caravans to build up their wealth and power base, but this particular caravan would be a major boost to their objectives.

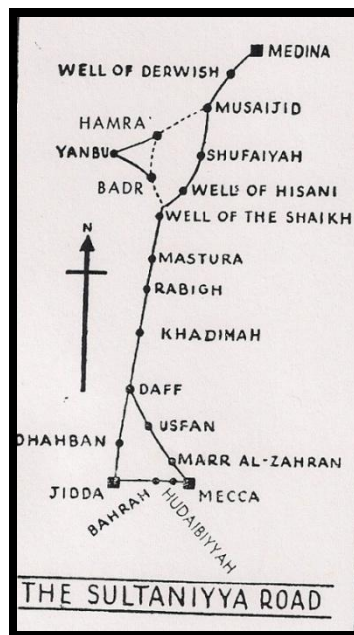


Figure 4. The Sultaniyya Road

The Sultaniyya Road was the most likely course Abu Sufyan took on his way from Mecca to Syria<sup>88</sup>



When Muhammad heard about the caravan he invoked his treaties with those at Medina saying, “This is the Quraysh caravan containing their property. Go out to attack it, perhaps God will give it as a prey.”<sup>89</sup> It appears from the sources that there was a relative reluctance to join him initially and perhaps some internal struggle on whether the real aim was the caravan and its economic benefits or the Quraysh army itself. The evidence for the latter may be found in the fact that Muhammad sent spies after the caravan on its way to Syria instead of attacking it in a mere raid like he had been doing. Sura 8:7 addresses this struggle as well when it mentioned “Allah promised you one of the two parties that it shall be yours.” The Quran makes it clear that the initial objective was the caravan and its booty with the words “you loved that the one not armed.”

Clearly, if it were Muhammad’s intentions to attack the “one not armed” in the caravan and not the army, he would have attacked immediately when he had a relative advantage of numbers and the element of surprise on his side. Abu Sufyan, for his part, did not remain idle in his preparations either and sent out his own spies while “questioning every rider in his anxiety,”<sup>90</sup> since he obviously expected to be attacked at some point along his journey. When he was allowed to continue to Syria he had to know there was an ambush waiting for him on his return so he dispatched one of his fastest riders to return to Mecca for reinforcements. In fact, Muhammad’s spies had accompanied the caravan all the way to Damascus and were discovered by Abu Sufyan there which makes the situation all the more puzzling. Why was it that Muhammad chose to continue north towards Syria when it was clear he didn’t know where the caravan was and his own plans had been made known to the Quraysh?

It is possible that Muhammad was still trying to consolidate his political power in the region north of Medina towards Badr and needed more time to approach the different tribes

living there. More likely, however, he needed to make sure the alliances he had already made amongst the *Ansar* were going to be honored in any battle beyond Medina. We have already seen the passages of complete submission to God's will in some of the hadith quoted above, but the question was aimed directly at the *Ansar* since they formed the majority of his army.

Muhammad received his answer from Sa'd b. Mu'adh when he said, "We believe in you, we declare your truth, and we witness that what you have brought is the truth, and we have given you our word and agreement to hear and obey; so go where you wish, we are with you;...we do not dislike the idea of meeting your enemy tomorrow. We are experienced in war, trustworthy in combat."<sup>91</sup>

The trading caravans would often generate widespread attention amongst the population and Abu Sufyan's was no exception. By the time Abu Sufyan and his caravan had begun to make the return trip to Mecca, the two armies were already on a collision course at Badr. Even though his spies were unable to locate the exact position of the Muslim army, he was undoubtedly able to glean information from those Bedouin spoken of earlier and they probably gave him a general idea as to the size of the army approaching him. Armed with this knowledge, Abu Sufyan was grateful for the messenger he sent to Mecca to mobilize the warriors there in order to come to the aid of the caravan in imminent danger of being captured.

Muhammad's army had already decided to make their way to Badr, probably to secure water and shelter for the tired men after marching for days in the oppressive desert heat. More likely, as Ishaq describes, the circuitous route Muhammad took was an indication that he was not clear where the Quraysh caravan was or where it would eventually end up. He probably relied on local Bedouin to lead him through the desert and it was them who likely led the party to Badr perhaps to use his influence in local politics. At this point, there were three parties converging

on Badr. Muhammad's army from the route towards Medina, Abu Sufyan's caravan coming from Damascus, and the Meccan army summoned to help the Quraysh caravan. Muhammad, for his part, sent forward a small reconnaissance party to the Badr wells and ran into two watermen from Quraysh. Ishaq tells us that the Muslim army was displeased at this, hoping they would be from Abu Sufyan. Apparently, though inconceivably, this is an indication that Muhammad did not know about the Meccan army approaching them and had as his focus the caravan. From these two watermen, Muhammad was able to determine the strength of the Meccan army to be between 900 and 1,000 men.<sup>92</sup> One author notes this about how Muhammad was able to attain this information: "[T]his was the law of war laid down by the Prophet which allowed obtaining information about the enemy through all possible sources and even if it should mean distortion of facts, provided of course it is in the interest of the Muslim army and for security reasons."<sup>93</sup>

Meanwhile, Abu Sufyan had done some reconnaissance of his own and went into the town himself to see what information he could gather. He was able to speak with someone who had conversed with the Muslim army and asked if they had seen anything unusual. He was able to determine, through some broken pieces of camel dung, evidence of the army and immediately sent word to the caravan to change its course away from Badr in order to avoid a potential engagement. The caravan made a forced two-night journey to arrive safely at Mecca while Abu Sufyan, seeing his caravan was now safe, sent an additional rider after them to tell the remainder of the army to stay behind since their services were no longer required.<sup>94</sup>

It is the argument of this paper that the Quraysh were looking for a fight while others have argued for their reluctance to continue on towards Badr. However, even when Abu Sufyan tried to turn the army back after the caravan had been saved telling them, "Since you came out to save your caravan, your men, and your property, and God as delivered them, go back" they still

came forward. Obviously, however, the safety of their people and goods wasn't enough since the response from Abu Jahl was "we will not go back until we have been to Badr" and, in a show of confidence bordering on arrogance continued, "we will spend three days there, slaughter camels and feast and drink wine, and the girls shall play for us. The Arabs will hear that we have come and gathered together, and will respect us in the future."<sup>95</sup> Each side now knew what they were facing. The Muslims had received their wish of a decisive action against the Quraysh and the Meccan army looked to receive retribution for Muhammad's rebellious activities.

### *The Battle*

Now that the respective armies had assembled near each other around Badr, it was inevitable the two would collide on the battlefield. On the eve of March 16, 624<sup>96</sup> Muhammad and his men prepared to receive the Quraysh army by marching into the valley of Badr. Muhammad's initial selection of the terrain indicates his relative lack of knowledge in military affairs as he was challenged by one of his more experienced tacticians asking, "Is this a place which God has ordered you to occupy, so that we can neither advance nor withdraw from it, or is it a matter of opinion and military tactics?"<sup>97</sup> Muhammad deferred to his expertise and more choice ground was taken up so as to place the enemy's line of sight directly in the path of the sun during the critical early morning stages of the battle which would take place the next day. Similarly, the Muslim army also maneuvered to occupy the critical wells so as to deny the enemy the ability to drink any water during the fight, something they would have most assuredly needed with the intense desert heat.

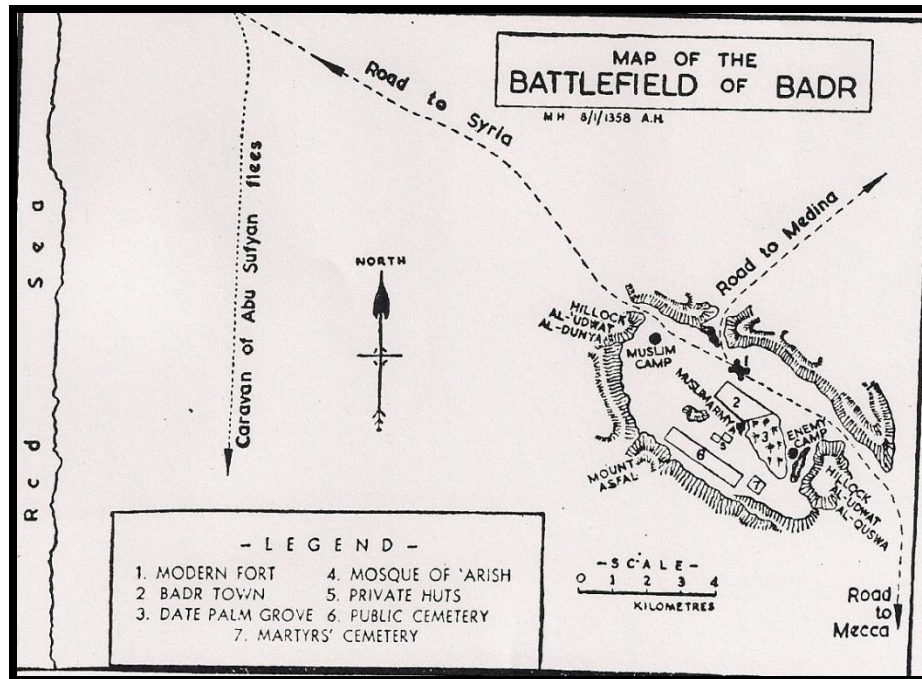


Figure 5. Map of the Battlefield of Badr

A general overview of the Battle of Badr. This map shows the probable routes each party took to the battlefield.<sup>98</sup>

The next morning before sunrise, the Quraysh advanced into the valley and arrayed them for battle. According to Ishaq, Muhammad called out, “O God, here come the Quraysh in their vanity and pride, contending with Thee and calling Thy apostle a liar.”<sup>99</sup> As was typical of tribal fighting of the times, the Quraysh organized themselves according to their tribe and the Muslim army appears to have done the same. Later sources say they were arranged by emigrants, Awsites, and Khazarajites each under a separate banner. They also exchanged code words or watchwords amongst their army as a typical melee would often confuse the participants without any standardized uniforms, exacerbated by the fact that brothers were fighting brothers and sons were fighting fathers. The Muslim army built a hut for Muhammad which served as a sort of command post for the duration of the battle and as a shelter for protection from the oppressive sun and heat.

Ishaq recalls a peculiar story that is important in understanding the motives for the Quraysh as they aligned their forces. The Meccan army sent a scout to reconnoiter the Muslim army and attempt to determine their strength. When he returned, he reported that they only had “three hundred men” and didn’t see any “in ambush or support.” Surprisingly, this scout attempted to dissuade the Quraysh from continuing because it appeared from his observations that the Muslim army was prepared for no retreat and no reinforcements. He let them know that “these men have no defense or refuge but their swords” and it was apparent that not one “of them will be slain till he slay one” of the Quraysh. Abu Jahl, one of their more prominent clan leaders, was asked his opinion on the matter and he encouraged the army to fight, telling them they had the “blood-revenge before your eyes” and there was no turning back now.<sup>100</sup>

This evidence conflicts with later sources which claim that the Muslims had all the advantage in morale and will to fight on their side and it was this advantage that led to their ultimate victory. We cannot know for certain what the motives were on the hearts and minds of the warriors was at the time, but it can be fairly clear that the two were well-prepared for the battle that was forthcoming. In typical contemporary style of the time, the fighting opened with a challenge from three Meccans to engage in individual combat, including the father of the man killed at Nakhla. When three *Ansar* stepped forward against them, the response from the Quraysh was hostile and they answered “we have nothing to do with you [*Ansar*]...send forth against us our peers of our own tribe!”<sup>101</sup> In response, Muhammad sent his uncle Hamza, his cousin Ali (who also was his son-in-law after marrying Muhammad’s daughter, Fatima), and another warrior named Ubayda.

With the sun in the face of their enemy, Hamza and Ali appeared to kill their foe with relative ease. Ubayda and his opponent exchanged blows and each inflicted mortal wounds on

the other. Ubayda's adversary had his leg severed with "the marrow oozing from it" and was quickly killed by the other two Muslim warriors after they dispatched their respective challengers. Ubayda was carried from the battlefield and taken to Muhammad where he asked, "Am I not a martyr, O apostle of God?" To which the reply was, "Indeed you are." After the opening duel a melee ensued that consumed the battlefield for approximately two hours. Ishaq tells us that Muhammad spent the opening stages of the battle praying in his hut, even to the point of a light sleep. When he finally came out and joined the fighting, his comment to Abu Bakr is enlightening towards understanding how he leveraged the concept of fate with his religious ideas of the afterlife saying, "no man will be slain this day fighting against them with steadfast courage advancing not retreating but God will cause him to enter Paradise."<sup>102</sup>

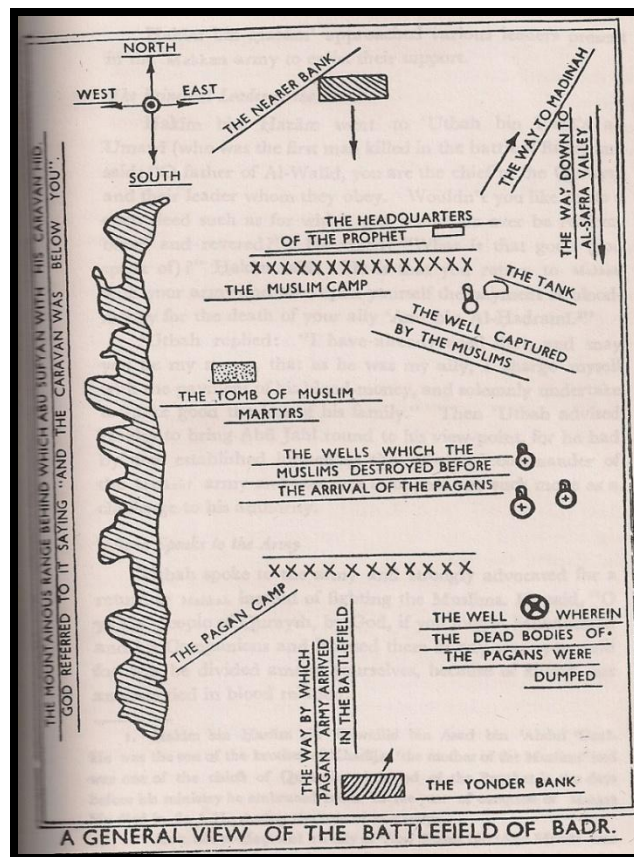


Figure 6. A General View of the Battlefield of Badr

This map displays a little more detail on the disposition of the Muslim and Quraysh forces.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, Muhammad invoked God's help for the army when he said "God's help is come to you. Here is Gabriel holding the rein of a horse and leading it. The dust is upon his front teeth." A later source indicates that Muhammad opened the battle by picking up a handful of rocks and threw them at the enemy as an indication to commence the attack. It was then (some traditions say was Gabriel and his 1,000 angels) a windstorm arose on the Meccans and clouded their vision and caused their army to become disjointed.<sup>104</sup> This story is somewhat corroborated by a report from a bystander who "went up a hill from which we could look down on Badr, we being polytheists waiting to see the result of the battle so that we could join in the looting. And while we were on the hill a cloud came near and we heard the neighing of horses and I heard one saying 'Forward, Hayzum!' (the name of Gabriel's horse).<sup>105</sup> Other reports of this nature are recorded in Ishaq and, while the historical accuracy of such information cannot be guaranteed, the significance of this belief of divine intervention in this battle cannot equally be discounted either.

Depending on the source, anywhere from 49 or 70 Quraysh were killed and about the same number were taken prisoner while about 14 Muslims were reported as killed during the action. Once it became clear the Muslims had the upper hand on the battlefield the Quraysh quickly departed and entered a full retreat towards Mecca. Muhammad had no means of pursuing them and focused his energies instead on apportioning the booty and taking care of the prisoners.<sup>106</sup> Muhammad ordered the dead Quraysh bodies thrown into the pit, and here is where the hadith and Quranic revelations cited above are related to. Muhammad sent emissaries to Mecca and Medina to tell them of what happened of how a relatively small army had defeated the over-confident and much wealthier Quraysh. The impact was immediate and Muhammad's power continued to rise.



### **Conclusion**

The stated objective of this paper was to show how cultural, religious, and political factors played a critical role in providing the necessary ingredients and motivations for the Battle of Badr. Furthermore, this battle must be seen as the most critical military moment in early Islamic history. Without military success, Muhammad could not have consolidated his power and his ministry would not have been propagated throughout the area with such rapidity and ease. The Battle of Badr was the launching point for establishing Islam as a world religion and the first offensively minded military action in Muslim history.

Today, scholars have attempted to explain the significance of Badr within the overall context of the Islamic religion or as a part of the overall life of Muhammad. Nowhere, however, is there a single source which directly details how momentous the battle was in establishing a world religion. Bashumail says “it is not only one of the decisive battles of Islamic history but was also the first serious confrontation between the forces of Islam and those of unbelief.”<sup>107</sup> Nafziger mentions that “this engagement is also described as the first *jihad*, or holy war, because it was an aggression by infidels who were intent on the destruction of Islam and the Muslims.”<sup>108</sup> Watt, following his comprehensive biography on Muhammad with a book on the critical role he played as a statesman said, “It would be a mistake, however, to think of Badr simply as a political event. For Muhammad and his followers it had a deep religious meaning.”<sup>109</sup> Gabriel’s conclusions, in a modern scholarly work on the military history of Muhammad, are similar to this one when he says that “Muhammad’s men had adopted the new religious community as a replacement for their loyalties to clan and kin” and this *ummah* would be the basis for future wars as realized in the concepts of *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*.

There are other, non-scholarly reactions to the Battle of Badr within the realm of Muslim writers that are important in understanding its significance to Islamic thought and jurisprudence. One such author claims that “The Battle of Badr proved that God had blessed the Messenger” and “after Badr, Muhammad was no longer a mere Shaykh or a Hakam; he and his followers were now the new political power in the Hijaz.”<sup>110</sup> Another says that “such inspiration [of the warriors at Badr] was enough for the role models of Islam, the names that echo in Muslim hearts” and noting that “the Battle of Badr is known as *furqan*, or the first trial between good and evil.”<sup>111</sup> The World Wide Web is also full of Islamic websites which attempt to establish Badr as “the first great battle in the history of Islam” while remembering “those who participated in it were granted honor and grace by Almighty Allah.”<sup>112</sup> Another calls it “much more than just an historical battle in the history of Islam” but a “very complex lesson on many different Islamic and humanitarian issues...full of divine revelation and mystical and miraculous events.”<sup>113</sup> While it seems impossible to conjecture the fate of the Islamic religion based on one circumstance, one web site states “had victory been the lot of the pagan army while the Islamic Forces were still at the beginning of their developments, the faith of Islam could have come to an end.”<sup>114</sup>

Badr represents the transition point of a small, disenfranchised religion in the Arabian Desert into an inherently offensive and worldwide faith with far reaching consequences. This transition incorporated preexisting cultural factors such as fate, retribution, and aggression with established political alliances manifested in the Constitution of Medina and the Aqaba agreements into a religiously-based holy war to expand the Muslim faith. After Badr, “warring in the path of God was now required virtually without restriction” and every Muslim now incorporated into the *ummah* was required to take part in it.<sup>115</sup>

The Battle of Badr provides lasting significance to many themes occurring in today's conflicts, most notably the Global War on Terrorism. Islam is perhaps the most widely misunderstood religion in the west and this confusion is propagated by Islamist Fundamentalists who steal the headlines away from the majority of peace-loving Muslims. When militant Christian organizations act out of bounds of the mainstream theological and established norms of customary beliefs, the effects can have similar repercussions towards inciting general hatred and contempt for what that small sect represents. Similarly when a small and radical group of religious fanatics begin to act out of line from conventional Muslim jurisprudence, the generic view of the religion as a whole is distorted and misinterpreted.

Former President George W. Bush was correct when he said the Global War on Terrorism was not against Islam and he was right in stating the United States had no quarrel with the Muslim faith. But just as the Allied powers had no disagreement with the German population and just the Nazi power in control, we should also recognize that the driving force behind the criminal behavior is that of radical Muslim extremists and we must continue to understand their motivations and behavior patterns. By examining the Battle of Badr we can better understand how these minority fanatical groups are leveraging established cultural practices in regions like Afghanistan, manipulating political forces such as the Taliban, and placing them on the back of a religion in Islam to achieve their heinous objectives.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1953. p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> All Quran passages are Taken from "The Noble Quran," Muslim Students Association, University of Southern California, <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/quran> and will be hereafter cited as Quran, 8:41

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Life of Muhammad*. Translated by Alfred Guillaume. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967. p. 82, 111.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rueven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ishaq, p. 151-152

<sup>7</sup> Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Quran*. London: Edinburgh University Press, 1953. p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. p. 95-96.

<sup>9</sup> Bell, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Richard A. Gabriel, *Muhammad: Islam's First Great General*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> The literature on Arabian and Middle Eastern geography and its subsequent influence on economy is, to put it lightly, voluminous. For ease of research and relevance, I have used Watt's consolidation and interpretation in Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. p. 1-4.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. P. 3

<sup>16</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. p. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, p. 5-6.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

<sup>20</sup> The poem is from Hatim al-Ta'i as given in Helmer Ringgren, *Studies in Arabian Fatalism* (Uppsala: A.B. Lundequistska, 1955), p. 50, cited by Firestone on p. 29

<sup>21</sup> Ishaq, p. 254-255.

<sup>22</sup> This is the basic concept of *jihad* which will be discussed later.

<sup>23</sup> Emil T. Homerin, "Echoes of a Thirsty Owl: Death and Afterlife in Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (Jul., 1985). p. 165

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>25</sup> Like many of the subjects covered, this is not intended to be a definitive look at the doctrine of certain aspects of the Islamic religion. Martyrdom in this instance will be limited to its impact at Badr. The literature on martyrdom is exhaustive and I have relied primarily on Michael Bonner. *Jihad in Islamic History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. p.72-83.

<sup>26</sup> Ishaq, p. 300.

<sup>27</sup> Ringgren, cited by Firestone on p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1956. p. 263 and Ishaq, p. 426-427.

<sup>30</sup> Ishaq, p. 492.

<sup>31</sup> This was a "document from Muhammad the prophet between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who followed them and joined and labored with them. They are one community (*ummah*) to the exclusion of all men." (Ishaq, p. 231-232) This document and other political pacts like it will be discussed later.

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- <sup>32</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*. p. 265.
- <sup>33</sup> Philip Carl Salzman, "The Middle East's Tribal DNA," *Middle East Quarterly*, (2008). p.1.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 3
- <sup>35</sup> Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. p. 15-20.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>37</sup> Firestone, p. 32.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 33.
- <sup>39</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*. p. 79.
- <sup>40</sup> Donner., p. 34-37.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 48-49.
- <sup>42</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*. p. 143.
- <sup>43</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. p. 17.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 7.
- <sup>45</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*. pp. 221-226 provides a brief discussion on whether it took place before or after Badr from various other sources. One argument relative here is the inclusion of the fact that some of the articles implied that some fighting had already taken place and is probably alluding to Badr. Since it is the thesis of this work that Badr was the first major battle in Muslim history, this seems like a reasonable argument. However, it is also equally clear that "fighting" in the sense the Constitution refers to does not necessarily mean a pitched battle like Badr but could be a reference to raiding or other forms of violence.
- <sup>46</sup> Ishaq, p. 232.
- <sup>47</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*. Oxford: Oxford Press, 1961. p. 96.
- <sup>48</sup> Donner, p. 54.
- <sup>49</sup> Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p. 91.
- <sup>50</sup> Ishaq, p. 198.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 199.
- <sup>52</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, "Al-Ansar" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by H. A. R. Gibb et al. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. vol. 1, p. 514.
- <sup>53</sup> Ishaq, p. 202.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 203-204.
- <sup>55</sup> Quran 22:40-42
- <sup>56</sup> Quran 2:193
- <sup>57</sup> Ishaq, pp. 212-213.
- <sup>58</sup> See Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, pp. 84-89.
- <sup>59</sup> Ishaq, pp., 231-232.
- <sup>60</sup> Quran 42:13
- <sup>61</sup> F. E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*. Albany: State University of New York, 1994. p. 202-204.
- <sup>62</sup> Frederick M. Denny, "Ummah in the Constitution of Medina," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36 (Jan., 1977). p. 44.
- <sup>63</sup> Ishaq, p. 233.
- <sup>64</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, pp. 238 – 249. Scholars agree that the Constitution of Medina was not a single document but was rather a combination of many and Watt places the latter article to a date after the Battle of Uhud and nearer to the execution of the Jewish Banu Qurayzah tribe. Therefore, the earlier inclusion of the Jews supports the idea of the necessity of Muhammad including varying tribes in his alliance before Badr, but after his victory the necessity of this and their utility to his coalition was not as vital.
- <sup>65</sup> Ishaq, p. 208.
- <sup>66</sup> E. Tyan, "dijihad" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by H. A. R. Gibb et al. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. vol. 1, p. 538.



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- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> A. Abel, "Dar al-Harb" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by H. A. R. Gibb et al. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. vol. 1, p. 126.
- <sup>69</sup> A. Abel, "Dar al-Islam" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by H. A. R. Gibb et al. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. vol. 1, p. 127.
- <sup>70</sup> Rudolph Peters in Andrew Bostom, ed. *The Legacy of Jihad: Islamic Holy War and the Fate of Non-Muslims*. New York: New York, 2008. p. 320.
- <sup>71</sup> Quran 3:123
- <sup>72</sup> Interestingly, *al-anfal* was the name of a Saddam Hussein operation in the late 1980's where the former Iraqi dictator attempted to eliminate, among others, the Kurdish population in Northern Iraq.
- <sup>73</sup> The hadith used here was excerpted from M. Mushin Khair, "Translation of Sahih Bukhari," Muslim Students Association, University of Southern California, <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari>
- <sup>74</sup> ahadith is the plural form of hadith.
- <sup>75</sup> Volume 5, book 58, number 229.
- <sup>76</sup> Volume 5, book 59, number 702.
- <sup>77</sup> Volume 5, book 59, number 298.
- <sup>78</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, "Badr" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by H. A. R. Gibb et al. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. vol. 1, p. 807.
- <sup>79</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad*. Hyderabad: Deccan, 1973. p. 14.
- <sup>80</sup> Muhammad Ahmad Bashumail *The Great Battle of Badr*. New Delhi, India: Islamic Book Service, 1999. p. 78.
- <sup>81</sup> Hamidullah, p. 15.
- <sup>82</sup> Gabriel, p. 84.
- <sup>83</sup> Ishaq, pp. 281-286; see also Bashumail, pp. 74-75.
- <sup>84</sup> Gabriel, p. 78.
- <sup>85</sup> Ishaq, p. 287.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup> Bashumail, p. 78.
- <sup>88</sup> Hamidullah, p.14.
- <sup>89</sup> Ishaq, p. 289.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 294.
- <sup>92</sup> Ishaq, p. 295.
- <sup>93</sup> Bashumail, p. 97
- <sup>94</sup> Hamidullah, p. 18.
- <sup>95</sup> Ishaq, p. 296.
- <sup>96</sup> This is the date given by Watt in *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p. 119. Ishaq and Hamidallah give November 18, 623 and Gabriel says March 15, 624. For a comprehensive view on dating the battle see J.M.B. Jones, "The Chronology of the 'Maghazi' - A Contextual Survey," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19 (1957): 245-280.
- <sup>97</sup> Ishaq, p. 297.
- <sup>98</sup> Hamidullah, p. 15.
- <sup>99</sup> Ishaq, p. 297.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 297-298.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 299.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 299-300.

<sup>103</sup> Bashumail, p. 101.

<sup>104</sup> Gabriel, p. 100-102.

<sup>105</sup> Ishaq, p. 303.

<sup>106</sup> Although not the focus of this study, the care of these prisoners is a hotly contested topic amongst the sources and would provide an excellent starting point for future research.

<sup>107</sup> Bashumail, p. 78.

<sup>108</sup> George F. Nafziger, *Islam at War: A History*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003. p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p. 125.

<sup>110</sup> Reza Aslan, *No god But God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*. New York: Random House, 2005. p.

88

<sup>111</sup> M. J. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords: Jihad and the Conflict Between Islam and Christianity*. London: Routledge, 2002. p, 9, 18.

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.islamonline.net/English/ramadan/1425/hopespringseternal/Ramadan%20Victories/11.shtml>

<sup>113</sup> <http://shiaonline.wordpress.com/2006/10/02/lessons-taken-from-the-battle-of-badr/>

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.al-islam.org/history/history/badr.html>

<sup>115</sup> Firestone, p. 114.